

# TIP SHEET: DISCUSSING COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

As public conversations around coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) increase, children may worry about themselves, their family and friends getting ill with COVID-19. Parents, family members, school staff and other trusted adults can play an important role in helping children make sense of what they hear in a way that is honest, accurate and minimizes anxiety or fear. CDC has created guidance to help adults have conversations with children about COVID-19 and ways they can avoid getting and spreading the disease.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES WHEN DISCUSSING COVID-19 WITH CHILDREN

### REMAIN CALM AND REASSURING

- Remember that children will react to both what you say and how you say it. They will pick up cues from the conversations you have with them and with others.

### AVOID LANGUAGE THAT MIGHT BLAME OTHERS AND LEAD TO STIGMA.

- Remember that viruses can make anyone sick, regardless of a person's race or ethnicity. Avoid making assumptions about who might have COVID-19.

### PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT CHILDREN SEE OR HEAR ON TELEVISION, RADIO OR ONLINE.

- Consider reducing the amount of screen time focused on COVID-19. Too much information on one topic can lead to anxiety.

### PROVIDE INFORMATION THAT IS HONEST AND ACCURATE.

- Give children information that is truthful and appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Talk to children about how some stories on COVID-19 on the Internet and social media may be based on rumors and inaccurate information.

### TEACH CHILDREN EVERYDAY ACTIONS TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF GERMS.

- Remind children to stay away from people who are coughing or sneezing or sick.
- Remind them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, then throw the tissue into the trash.
- Discuss any new actions that may be taken at school to help protect children and school staff. (e.g., increased handwashing, cancellation of events or activities)
- Get children into a handwashing habit.
  - Teach them to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing their nose, coughing or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
  - If soap and water are not available, teach them to use hand sanitizer. Hand sanitizer should contain at least 60% alcohol. Supervise young children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent swallowing alcohol, especially in schools and childcare facilities.

*Source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases*